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C.P. CAVAFY

Second Odyssey

Translated from the Greek by George Economou

A second and great Odyssey as well,
maybe even bigger than the first, but alas,
with no Homer, no hexameters.

Small was his ancestral home,
small was his native hometown,
his entire Ithaca was small.

Telemachos's affection, Penelope's
fidelity, his father's longevity,
his band of old friends, his people's
loyal devotion, the blissful repose of home
poured like rays of joy into the seafarer's heart.

And just like rays, dissolved.

A thirst
awoke inside him for the sea.
He hated the air over dry land.
Phantoms out of the West
troubled his sleep every night.
Nostalgia possessed him
for voyages and early morning
arrivals into harbors that
one joyfully enters for the first time.

That Telemachos's affection, that Penelope's
fidelity, his father's longevity,
that band of old friends, his people's
loyal devotion, the peace and repose of home—
Boring!

—And he was gone.

As the coastline of Ithaca
gradually disappeared from sight
and he set full sail for the way west,
for Iberia, for the Pillars of Hercules—
leaving behind all the Achaean seas—
he felt alive again, felt
liberated from the oppressive ties
to familiar and domestic matters.
And his adventurous heart exulted
in cold blood, with nary a drop for love.